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# T.L.S.

## THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

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### POETRY NOW

Louis Simpson, Craig Raine,  
Ted Hughes, Robert  
Conquest, John Fuller,  
'A Faust Book'

Socialism and Centralism,  
by David Marquand

Royal reminiscences,  
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France's road to war,  
by Douglas Johnson

Calaris; Buster Keaton;  
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### CATCHING UP

Philosophy, Africa,  
International Relations



"Alice walking in the garden at B. Palace": Queen Victoria's drawing of her third child and second daughter (born 1843), and nurse, clearly owes its manner partly to her concurrent interest in etching. From Queen Victoria's Sketchbook, by Marina Warner (see pages 7 and 8 of this issue of the TLS).

Dennis Duncanson  
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**By E. S. Turner**

No one will be surprised to learn that American universities give courses on the films of Buster Keaton. In his later years the "Great Stone Face" fell among existentialists and, as his latest biographer says, his works were hailed as "paradigms of the human condition," inspired by "Heidegger's Dasein, his notion of what it's like 'being there' in the world."

Samuel Beckett's suit the script of *Waiting for Godot* in Keaton's idiosyncratic style. Keaton's idiosyncrasy turned it down because he did not understand it. No doubt many will wish that Keaton, whose forte was improvisation, could have been let loose on *Godot*. However, Beckett eventually persuaded him to appear in a stage film. He was to illustrate Beckett's theory that "to be in it is to be perceived." It shows him from the rear as he walks through the streets, with people filching and reeling away as they catch sight of his features. Eventually, in his room, he is shown to the camera, as if he should be something out of Grand Guignol.

When this short was shown in 1965 at the Venice Film Festival the moist-eyed Katsur was given a standing ovation. He had been right to take the existentialists' money, modest though it was compared with the fees for making television commercials.

Kennin, who had only one day's schooling, insisted that he was no artist, had no serious thoughts and was merely an expert in visual gags and "practicals." His role in the main was that of a "sophisticated" "saphend" or jinx. Sentiment and pathos he usually left to Chaplin; his speciality was fighting natural elements or mechanical instruments. At times when the situation consisted of pie-throwing, or people stoking each other round city blocks and colliding at the corners, he introduced new natural elements. One of his secrets was simple multiplication: he was pursued, not by one would-be bride, but by 500; not by one policeman, but by the entire New York police force; not by one angry sergeant, but by an army. Using a camera trick, he made fifty-four revenue men emerge from one car. If his film was said to be a masterpiece, Bunuel called him as a surrealist. It was something he could live with.

Tom Dardis's biography rightly celebrates Keaton's climb back after the alcoholism which nearly took him in his fifties (he died aged seventy). "In 1960 the comedian gave an 'as told to' account of his life in *My Wonderful World of Slapstick* and seven years later a lively biography by Rudi Blash appeared. Dardis's well-informed book is strong on the financial aspects of his hero's career for he had had access to audio records; but the deaths of Keaton's first

**By Robert Morley**

**HOLAND CULVER:**  
Not Quite a Gentleman  
192pp, William Kimber, £7.95.  
0 7183 0107 2

In his autobiography, *No Quarter*, A. J. Cuervo relates that at an early age he attended a performance at Meskoyote and Cook's and was considerably impressed by a conjurer pulling a cloth from under a fully laid table, leaving the crockery undisturbed. He was so impressed that he spent a year for ten at Fullers and a quick throw up in the mission club. He tried the same experiment himself but for some reason on this occasion the trick failed to work—perhaps the conjurers who he took to be magicians were not magicians. One imagines the conjurer knew exactly at what speed and in what

tion wives have made it possible to tell more about his private life. The second wife, who was tacitly condemned Susie by Blech, was a nurse employed in an institution for alcoholics and Keston always claimed he could not remember anything her.

As infant terrible of a variety act, young Keaton was hurled about the stage by his father, who wore a steel plate on his head to withstand thwacks with a broom handle wielded by the boy. Child protection societies rose up in anger, but the law was unable to stop an act consisting of pure violence. In this wonderful world of mayhem young Keaton learnt not only how to



*The pensive bridegroom: Buster Keaton explores his pockets while waiting at the church in Seven Chances (1925), in which he plays a man given only one day to find a bride and so inherit \$7m. (From The Best of Buster, edited by Richard J. Anobile; Elm Tree Books, 1976.)*

fall but how to preserve that rigid mask which pernicked audiences that the whole thing was funny. In a piece taken at the age of five he looks like an evilly inscrutable little penguin.

By the time Keaton became too big to hurl into the wings the film industry was making the first two-reelers. He was given his first opening by Fatty Arbuckle, whose career later foundered in wild disgrace. Soon Keaton had his own studios, producing two-reelers by his own exclusive methods, followed by a series of full-length films like *The Navigator* and *Boatling Butler*. His most famous film, *The General*, depicting a great railway chase set



in the period of the American Civil War, was by no means a financial triumph. Its release coincided with the financial crisis brought about by the coming of talking pictures and Keaton was forced to shelter under the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer roof. There he had no option but to work to a budget and was forbidden to depart from the script. Mr. Dardis assures us that Keaton's talking films made him a star, not one of the "quintessence of sound." Here he was by now a coenalty, not only of the bottle, but of his domestic problems. His first wife was one of the three Talmadge sisters and, if the author is right, they and their mother tried to rule

his life, even telling him that two children were enough and that any more would constitute "analfabetic behaviour".

He work suffered and telegrams from the studio became stiff and stiffer, ending with one dismissing him "for good and sufficient cause". It seemed all over, but gradually he came back as circea clown, gag-writer, player of cancio parts, guest artist and television personality. In 1957 he had the unhappy experience of seeing himself played on television in *La Buena Noche, Story*, but the \$60,000 solatium bought him a modest ranch house.

The Kaaton we meet in these pages, which are infested with alcoholic and practical jokers, is a complex and often contradictory character. Pessimism is part of the stock-in-trade of humour, but was the vital part of Kaaton's. He Dardis toys with the thought that the violence of childhood might have left "indelible psychic scars". Many found the comedian hard to know, withdrawn and melancholic, yet he was able to turn his bruised baseball and joined in many a fearful game. Wild beasts, we are told, took to him, or was that just publicity guff? Certainly women took to him; in his youth he liked making up and he was a very good actor. His act was clearly too much of a good thing.

The author cites evidence of Keaton's "incredible sweetness" and assures us he was "incredibly" and "unbelievably" grateful; also that his power to create scenes which were "incredibly poignant" was supported by "astoundingly acute analytical powers." Perhaps the editors on whom Mr Dardis seemingly leans should cut off his supply of adverbs. There are more than thirty pages of "filmography" for which those unveritelas should be properly grateful.

The carnage, disease and desolation that have resulted from the "liberation" of Cambodia by communist arms nearly five years ago bava taxed the capacity of language to express our horror. Will that horror bring into question at last the belief which has been so pervasive since the Second World War, that nationalism is noble and beneficent and reflects the natural political condition of mankind?

When in 1975 Saigon and Phnom Penh's Gomorrah of greed, corruption and profligacy in the judgment of the liberal world—were about to fall, most commentators pool-poohed fears that a bloodbath lay ahead in Indochina, since the triumphant Marxist-Leninists had renounced the rule of the few who had the independence, and therefore the welfare, of their three outposts at heart. I admit I said myself that, in Vietnam, because there had been a bloodbath after the Geneva Agreement of 1954, and the previous land reform, there need be no second one. In Cambodia, only Prince Sihanouk could have rallied opposition; but, first raised to the throne by Vichy's wartime governor-general who appreciated Sihanouk's royal blood and who joined the communists he couldn't lick. Today, the victors have fallen out over the spoils, and it is to Sihanouk (in *L'Express* of Paris) that was one disclosure of the savage partition of the regime's legitimated, both before and after 1975.

Sihanouk confirms that Pol Pot's axiomatization of Cambodia's educated classes "was planned back in the 1960s", although he halves the estimate of three million slaughtered (out of a population of seven million) to a million, as reported by the Hanoi and Moscow media. Pol Pot has himself confirmed the pounding of townfolk from their homes at gun-point, like the vanquished in medieval Angkor's wars, when he seized power in 1975, the abolition of the result of the social control, of all schools, law and government, and of money, is matter for boast. Being one worse than Mao Tse-tung's "little red soldier" bullies in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the regime armed youths in the provinces to practice survivors of their massacres with forced labour, which consisted of digging canal after canal in a senseless network of irrigation "to crush the captive forces of production". Pol Pot's practice that this rabble of adolescents and drivers had no responsible commanders and that, like the "barefoot doctors" who stood in for the dead doctors, they received no training save Maoist practices on the spot. Sihanouk's statements are of things he observed personally: he saw how young recruits brought up as Buddhists were brutalized by being taught to gleat in competitive cruelty while they inflicted on capriciously alienated deaths on captives, including Buddhist monks. (Specially repudiated in Buddhism), as "practice" for the budding of human beings.

Foreign governments which, with the United Nations, continued to recognize the fugitive ramp of this gangster as the government of Cambodia, are asked to withdraw recognition should Cambodia honor the breach of the Charter. The United Nations to transfer recognition to King Sam-  
in, the puppet installed by the People's Army of Vietnam when, after a preliminary campaign to drive the occupants of Pol Pot's gully, the army symbolically them in a Cambodian "Revolution" force a "liberated" area in 1970, a year ago. Neither puppet nor patron, runs the argument on lines familiar from the days of the first liberation, can be a fraction as wicked as the monster of Pol. But even if we for 1974 in Vietnam and over-look the "sore" of the United States, the argument is dis-  
gusting. King Samrit tells us he wants, and that preliminary cam-  
paign, Pol Pot's "Chief of Staff" in the frontier districts, as he must share the responsibility for atrocities committed by the communists.  
The main point is the communists' nature. As a man, Pol Pot, who own accounts of the Khmer Rouge, who placed the Pol Pot in the first place, fighting his battles for him, a headliner from front to finish. It was the young peasants

they conscripted and armed for him (with weapons supplied by Peking) who committed the first atrocities in 1970, against the Buddhist clergy, and who threatened "the masses" out of the four great rivers of Lapu, Krapu, Kraue, in Heng Samra's territory. From then on, Sihanouk too knelt perfectly well when he was benefiting with his royal charisma, notwithstanding the disarming conduct of his subjects. Sihanouk cooperated in collaboration with Wilfred Burchett (in *My War with the CIA*). The Hanoi comrades voiced no disgust until it suited them to overthrow Pol Pot, and then they began to regard the crimes of the Khmer Rouge as a necessary sacrifice. Peking still champions his legitimacy on no higher principle than that which prompted Chinese financial and technical assistance to him while he was perpetrating his atrocities. The notion of loosening Hanoi's menacing grip, in alliance with the Soviet Union, on Indochina as a whole. The famine in Cambodia—now played up by the United Nations—was a necessary sacrifice, because on the one hand they need to get hold of food (especially for their huge unproductive People's Army) but on the other dare not let foreigners observe the human suffering. Now the famine has engendered—did not precede, but followed, their invasion. It was hardly as saviours that they conquered Cambodia, but in obedience to a strategic imperative to control its territory, their with-  
out a safeguard against north-south dissidence among their own nation.

Pol Pot, Heng Samrin, Sihanouk — and for that matter the ministers of the Khmer Republic who deposed Sihanouk in 1970 and were crushed in his name in 1975 — have all trumpeted their nationalism and claimed to abide by its principles and the national ideals of their silent subjects. On their side, the Vietnamese communists have assured the world, against the evidence of their deeds, that they have no nationalistic pretensions beyond Vietnam. All my life, I have been sceptical about nationalism as a political motive; I have never understood by what logic nationalism can be good, but not civil war. "Oh," you get told, "you must pick out the genuine nationalists." But by what touchstone? That of militancy perhaps? Is the nation's leader who seeks office by beating his chest a genuine nationalist then less genuine a nationalist than the one who beats the ploughshare of colonial development and into swords for people's war? Everybody has a touchstone, but what are the proper editors who answered me in public, is the surest sign of genuine nationalism; but what if both sides are sometimes heroes, sometimes cowards, sometimes right, sometimes reckless rallies on foreign forces a touchstone of non-genuineness? If so, the touchstone needed to be very fine-grained to discriminate between Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge, between American and Hanoi attackers backed by 300,000 Chinese (Peking's figure). Was Sihanouk's nationalism less or more genuine when he was Prince or King?

United Nations on Pol Pot's behalf, or now that he is an emigré in search of a Congress of Vienna to restore him to his throne? Are not Pol Pot and Heng Samrin equally disgraced by their complete acquiescence at crucial moments on the Vietnamese high command? The only Cambodians left over to qualify as genuine nationalists by this touchstone would be the "Germorres"—ones who fought alone to the last bullet against the American public war against them; they lie among the dead.

Handt urges recognition of Heng Samrin by comparing Pol Pot to "a traitor such as Hitler." But there is a difference. Hitler at least pretended that his victims were not members of Pol Pot's own nation, whereas Pol Pot has butchered above all his fellow countrymen in the cause of "national liberation." The outside world is not likely to assume that "national liberation" is the same as nationalism, and therefore beneficent, noble and so on, but for Marxist-Leninists, which all the communist factions in Indochina agree they are, whether or not national liberation is their primary rationale, readily to think that the concept is irreconcilable with nationalism as irreconcilable with Marxist class struggle.

## DENNIS DUNCANSON



*"The USSR supports the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia"—one of Giorgio Forettini's cartoons from his new collection, Librus. See also page 22.*

he coined "national liberation" expressly as a decent cloak to cover a "conspiracy" (his word) of social and diplomatic wiles enabling the communist minority in a colonial territory to win power over the majority. The minority's objective must be absolute power: contentment with anything less would be a "strategic compromise" of the high revolutionary purpose. Marx's class struggle emblematically figures in Leninist catechism as a means, and a pretext, for liquidation of rivals after power has been won, not as an end. It was a "class enemy" who posed the challenge to the party dictatorship were killed in North Vietnam in 1954 and in Cambodia in 1975.

The slogan "national librettos" describes more foreigners than natives. The Vietnamese communists have always grasped the value of foreign recognition in securing submission and dastardly resistance at home. They got their first firm foothold at Hanoi in 1945 when the American Office of Strategic Services (predecessor of the CIA), supplanting their "national" liberation" was another Reorganization, gave Ho Chi Minh ostentatious public acclaim as "one of the Allies" and

United States warplanes flew past him in the air. The Emperor saluted to them, and the masses stood by, convinced. It was the Geneva Agreement of 1954 which gave the communists North Vietnam, that of 1962 the Ho Chi Minh Trail, through Laos, and the Paris Agreement of 1973, the war services of South Vietnam — not their lives and arms. These were decisive steps for them in overcoming the resistance of their fellow countrymen. Today, Hanoi requires International recognition for Heng Samrin in order to allow any opposition to him in Cambodia. And the UN has held up for famine relief with the demand, while the starving starve, that the donors' governments should transfer recognition to him. If some relief agencies note slight relaxation, it is probably the result less of the UN than of the UN's ally, Cambodia sent to him then need for the free food on offer to swell stocks to Indochina as a whole.

I am usually contradicted when I question nationalism as a popular sentiment, whether in Indochina or in other countries where I have worked. I have watched mass favour explode in Vietnam, but it was religious, not nationalist—faith

## e Breeds for the rifle. Between the

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow, and to send us the answers so that they reach this office no later than Friday, January 25 (the time allowed for the competition has been extended by a week in response to requests from overseas readers). A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers to be opened, or failing

that the most nearly correct—in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

Entries should be addressed to the Editor, The Times Literary Supplement, PO Box No. 7, New Printing House Square, Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8EZ, and marked "Author, Author" on the envelope. The solution and result will appear in our issue of February 1.

**Competition No 5**  
 1. You've seen my snuff-box haven't you? And you never saw me take snuff, the reason being that in my snuff-box I carry a piece of Parmesan cheese - a cheese made in Italy, very nutritious.  
 2. Here the crow starves, here the patient stag.

Breeds for the rifle. Between the soft moor.  
And the soft sky, scarcely room  
To leap or soar. Substance  
                    crumbles, in the thin air,  
Mean cold or moon hot. The roed  
                    wind in  
Listlessness of ancient war,  
Laeguar of broken steel,  
Clamour of confused wrong, apt  
in ellence.

3. The great event of a boy's life is the awakening of sex. He will bathe many times a day, or get up at dawn and having stripped leap to and fro over a stick laid upon two chairs and hardly know, and never admit, that he had begun to take pleasure in his own nakedness, nor will he understand the change until some dream discovers it. He may never understand at all the greater change in his mind.

**Result of competition No. 3:**  
**Winner: A. G. Robinson of London**  
**NW3.**

**Answers:**

1. Yet half seemed to recognize some trick  
 Of mischief happened to me, God knows what.

against faith, cudgels in hand. The earliest forces the communists mobilized in Indochina were frontier bands of communist guerrillas. Five years afterwards, the bulk of their rank and file—in Laos leapt through till 1975—were tribal groups, faction against faction within the same tribe. During the years of full-scale warfare, guerrillas or conventional men on both sides were equally successful in the fact—though doubtless inocrimated later with nationalist slogans (of unknowable effect). But of spontaneous petrolion zeal in combat there has been no sign independent of contrived propaganda. Instead the signs are that the political upheavals have been struggles for succession to colonial power, ambition thair driving force, fellow countrymen the targets for their guile; "armed propaganda" and manipulation of local tensions, rather than broad appeal to sentimentality have "moved the masses", inducing gellantry has won victories in people's war. The difference between Pol Pot and Heng Samrin is that the former had the chance to carve out his own state to lord it over, whereas the latter has not. Sihanouk has accepted a member crown from any "hegemon" willing to confer it—a very human attitude but not distinctly nationalist.

The anti-colonial prejucia of the neorsighted Roosevelt combined with the Leninist ambitions of a Alliance Stalin to give the Allies power, and to set our own way to a colonialism, a dictation, an economic emancipation not barygale for before we declared war on Hitler in 1939. Three decades of tootrotr experience have failed to disbusub the Leninist that the world is to be decolonizerion was calculated to strengthen resistance to the extreme of communist power; the illusion of resistance power; the American illusions about sources of power; the Third World quickly swamped the Leninist. The Leninist as well in our own public philosophy as well. One might hope that the martyrdom of the Cambodians will awaken realism at least—that we should look back to the Leninist now on "freedom" and "nationalism" as "petriotic forces" and "national liberation" wherever those calling ring out. However, optimism is tempered by news that Cambodia has been ruled inside Cambodia faster than ever since the Leninist for it received support from public city purpoeding untruthfully, to prove that Pol Pot and his ruffians only became brutalized under American purpoeding. The Leninist, the United States (our side) has tried to frustrate their "nationalist" mission, their rule would have turned out wise old kind. Communist has even more gasped, and thus has compounded the Leninist's ostrich to use the relief gasped through is now added to Hanoi's unscrupulous weapons for procurin the Leninist's recognition and for the Leninist's dominion over all of Indochina.

In a bad dream, perhaps. Her  
Progress this way. When, in the  
Of giving up, one time more, came  
As when a trap shuts—your  
—Robert Browning, "Child  
Roland to the Dark Tower  
Came."

2    There was nowhere at all to go  
And no diversion now but to peruse  
What literature the winds might blow  
Into the copse where his body lay  
A year-old elaeot of sporting news  
A crumpled schoolboy essay,  
—Robert Graves, "The suicide  
in the copse".

3    Incredible panic rules,  
People are hysterical, handing out

Drinks, are boiling, lead  
drinks, are boiling. The worse  
treated he is. Boils select, boils  
A harmless man, at an intersection  
sold, under his breath, 'Christ!  
— John Berryman, *The Drunken*  
Songs.



























